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Analysis and evaluation of school culture in kindergartens

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Abstract

The paper deals with the view of school culture in kindergartens in the Czech Republic, and specific research in the Faculty of Education in Hradec Kralove University, which focused on the analysis and evaluation of factors in school culture. It presents selected research results which show school culture gaps in kindergartens.

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Keywords: evaluation, school culture, kindergarten

1. Introduction

Kindergartens in the Czech Republic went through the changes in society since 1989 as well as a great transformation in the view of pre-school education and training and also their management. The philosophy of kindergartens has also changed with the development of knowledge on human, educational and management processes. In modern times it has been necessary to cope with both the practical changes of kindergartens and new terminology, which most certainly includes the notion of school culture. Jakubikova (1999) defines school culture as an internal phenomenon, which is primarily developed and used in the management and relationship to school employees. It is an interplay of ideas, attitudes and values widely shared and maintained for a relatively long time in a school. Kindergartens gained autonomy and thus became independent, unique with their own philosophy, image and school culture.

2. School culture in kindergartens

Kindergartens are characterized by their culture, by which it is possible to develop and cultivate or suppress some of its negative effects. An important role is played by the needs, interests and values recognized by staff and children. We believe that culture has the key importance in the everyday life of kindergartens.

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School culture can be determined by factors such as: common goals, confidence in school management, management style in relation to people, school management and organizational structure, management focusing on workload, control, staff motivation, communication and awareness of school staff, school communication with environment and parents, innovation development of teachers, working conditions for education, aesthetic environmental and policy, relations between workers, relations between teachers and children, expectation of learning outcomes, etc. These aspects play a dominant role in not only the culture of kindergartens, but also in leaderships and managerial role of every manager and teacher in a kindergarten. School culture presents recognized values of the team and symbols presenting the communication method by which a school and its staff are managed, it appeals to children, their parents and a school's surroundings. School culture is often underestimated in practice, especially in kindergartens, in which the verbal and formal approaches dominate in their activities.

Shaping of a school culture is a long-term process that requires considerable effort from all members of management of the institution. It requires a change in themselves, their behaviour and the ability to indicate a change to their sub-ordinates and their surroundings. School culture in itself includes the security of proper value orientation of school, achieving consensus among diverse sub-cultures (segmental, autocratic, collegial, ...) and applying a set of standards and values that affect the attitude toward school. As particularly significant aspects - factors in school culture shall be considered: trust, empathy; mutual co-operation; control; further training of teachers; reward system; automotivation; joint formulation of goals.

Innovations and changes in kindergartens enforce a change in management style, change in management methods, information systems, reward systems, submitting reports, human skills, experience, etc. The issue of school culture relates to leadership and management style - leadership, to which in the past sufficient space was not devoted in school and kindergartens management.

In today's kindergartens with modern management it is expected to create new functions and roles for a manager – Head pedagogical worker towards the required level of school culture. The Head pedagogical worker is becoming more a teacher and organizer who helps their sub-ordinates as a coach, guide, facilitator, mentor or partner to understand the functioning of the organization, problem causes, individual behaviour of employees and they contribute greatly to creating a school culture. As an organizer he/she tries to reduce the gap between the needs of individuals and the interest of the organization and to connect the needs and aspirations of people with organizational goals. The role of manager in a new era expects to deal with the management style and its evaluation, image, marketing, strategy and vision, as well as modern forms and creative methods and the interaction and motivation of employees. The Head teacher and director of a kindergarten must handle competence in the changed conditions of preschool education and school management, and constantly provide the impetus to create a positive school culture. It is important that every employee of a kindergarten respects and defends their school culture in conjunction with the school climate, in favour of the mental hygiene of children and the natural atmosphere. The concept of school climate, we see in internalizing of school culture, school culture perception by its members, their satisfaction and then the emerging quality and effectiveness of a school. This needs the kindergarten staff team to be able to collaborate, co-operate and try to develop more precise evaluating criteria for the work of teachers and other staff, classes and the school as a whole. The key role in the evaluation system of a kindergarten must be played by school culture, and it is necessary to motivate employees to its observance. To survey the quality of the social climate and school culture, there are evaluation methods and techniques with systematically applied feedback.

The current manager of a kindergarten is required to be more professional and show awareness of school culture. Therefore, there is also a need for systematic training of managers in this field. Faculties of Education are interested more than ever in the issue of school management, and they include school culture into the content of management disciplines. They realize that it is necessary to reflect the current state of kindergartens' culture and deal with the development of individual factors. For all these reasons, a plan to trace the strengths and weaknesses of the school culture was born and bring inspirations to improve the professional preparations of teachers and school managers in the study at faculties of education.

3. Specific research in the Faculty of Education at Hradec Kralove University

The Faculty of Education at Hradec Kralove University, specifically the Institute of primary and pre-primary education, developed a project of specific research on the Analysis of school culture in kindergartens, for the

purpose of detecting and identifying the gaps of school culture in kindergartens with reference to factors that appear to be risky – with the greatest cultural gap.

The appointed contractor is PaedDr. Vladimíra Horáčková, Ph.D. From the Department of primary and pre-primary education, FoEHKU, and the co-authors are students of the first year master's degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy – Kateřina Princová and Tereza Šimková.

1.1. The research objective:

For that research, we established the following objectives:

The research objective:

To conduct an analysis of the school culture in current kindergartens and to reveal its strengths and weaknesses

Sub-goals:

- To carry out the research of school culture in kindergartens, analyze and reflect the current state of kindergartens' culture,
- To identify strengths and weaknesses of kindergartens' culture, to discover the risks and gaps
- To evaluate results – an analysis of the data obtained.

Secondary objectives:

- To encourage pedagogical students' direct contact with the school environment of kindergartens,
- To develop students' skills needed to implement science-research projects, (socio-psychological skills when working in terrain, cognitive skills in work with information)
- To present results in an expert journal and international scientific conference
- To bring inspiration to improve school culture in kindergartens,
- To upgrade the training of teachers and school managers.

1.2. Solution procedure

Firstly, *together* with the students we began to focus on the available domestic and foreign materials on the issue of school culture in school management (professional literature, resources from the Internet). We formulated partial reconnaissance tasks and sought standardized questionnaire from Eger (2002) for the assessment of school culture. We specified the methodological procedures and techniques for data acquisition. Then an analysis of the current situation, evaluating collected data and a statistical analysis was conducted. The interpretation, correlation and discussion of the results were interesting. In conclusion, a task to create a final report that will be beneficial to publish in an expert journal and presented at international scientific conference.

1.3. The research group

Pedagogical staff of kindergartens in the Czech Republic. Number of respondents - 200, (30 - piloting).

1.4. The methods and techniques used

A standardized questionnaire for the assessment of school culture from the author L. Eger (2003), which diagnoses the positive and negative factors of kindergarten culture. The data obtained was processed using descriptive methods and correlations.

1.5. Controllable results of the solution

We present selected results concerning the evaluation of factors of the current and expected state of kindergarten culture among respondents in individual factors - issues.

The school culture factors - *Interview questions* (Kilmann Saxton in Eger, 2002):

- 1 Common objectives
- 2 Confidence in management
- 3 The predominant style in relation to people
- 4 School system and organizational structure
- 5 Focus of the management on workload
- 6 Control
- 7 Motivation of staff
- 8 Communication and awareness of school staff
- 9 Communication of the school with the environment and parents
- 10 Innovation
- 11 Development of teachers
- 12 Working conditions for teaching
- 13 Aesthetic environmental and policy
- 14 Relations between workers
- 15 Relations between teachers and pupils
- 16 Expectations of educational outcomes

1.6. The research results

At this point we want to interpret the selected results of the research carried out, which at the same time lead us to a discussion and comparison of the reported factors of school culture.

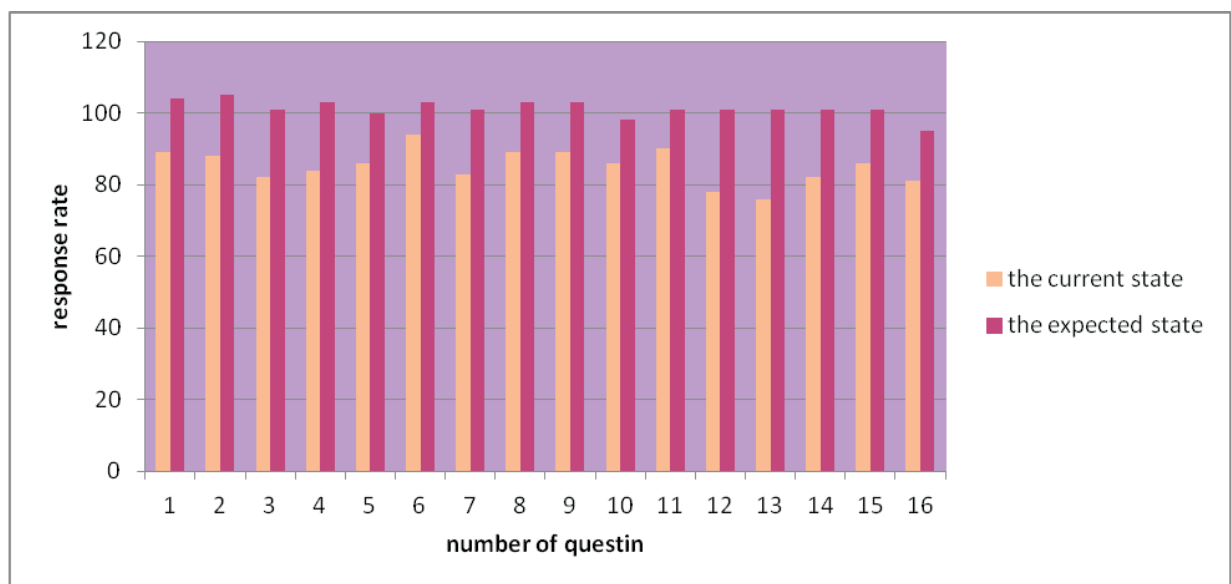


Figure 1: The current and expected state of evaluation of kindergartens' culture factor

Comment: Figure No. 1 points to gaps in school culture, because significant differences were shown between the factors identified as the current state and the desired or expected state of evaluation of school culture in kindergartens in various factors. The biggest difference appeared in issues No. 2, 3, 4, 11, 12. This means that the weaknesses of school culture are a kindergarten system and organizational structure, creation of job conditions for the work of teachers and support of teachers' professional development, aesthetic environment and order.

1.7. The statistical processing of obtained data

NCSS2007 program was used for statistical data processing.

For a comparison of average values, the Student's t-test (Table 1, "T") was used, and given that the data did not completely correspond with normal distribution (normality tests were applied - the Kolmogorov - Smirnov, D'Agostin's), non-parametric Mann - Whitney's test (Table 1, "Z") was also used. The tests were performed at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. (comparing average current and expected values).

H_0 : There is no statistically significant difference between the average current value and the expected value.

Table 1: Statistical evaluation of current and expected state of the factors in school culture.

	T	Z	H_0
O1	-5.7938	-4.5734	Overruled
O2	-6.3069	-5.2400	Overruled
O3	-4.7470	-3.9830	Overruled
O4	-7.4500	-5.3477	Overruled
O5	-3.1792	-2.7729	Overruled
O6	-3.2581	-3.1486	Overruled
O7	-4.8738	-4.1519	Overruled
O8	-7.0711	-5.1142	Overruled
O9	-4.8147	-4.0622	Overruled
O10	-4.7150	-3.9235	Overruled
O11	-3.1812	-2.8991	Overruled
O12	-8.3927	-5.4672	Overruled
O13	-8.1421	-5.2782	Overruled
O14	-5.0932	-4.2648	Overruled
O15	-4.7235	-4.1382	Overruled
O16	-4.2170	-3.6360	Overruled

Comment: The table shows the current and expected state of factors in school culture, with the fact that the strengths are items such as No. 3, 5, 7, 11 and the weakness is shown by factor No. 2, 4, 12, 13, 16.

From the statistical results, we choose and state a few graphs with the factors - items with the largest culture gap. We selected factors in issues No. 4, 12, 13.

Factor - Issue No. 4: The biggest cultural gap showed up at issue No. 4 and it concerns the factor focused on the system of a kindergarten and organizational structure:

Table 2: Question 4 - comparison of values

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	T value	Z value	H_0
O4a	3,9	0,65	-7,4500	-5,3477	Reject
O4b	4,95	0,20			

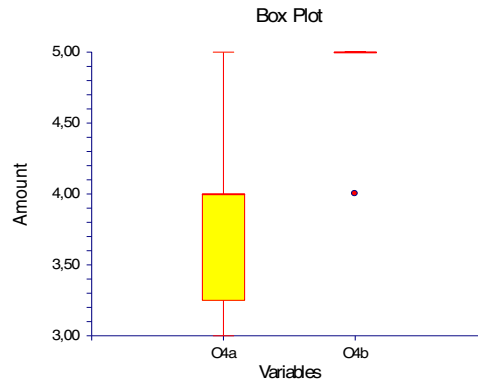


Figure 2 - Evaluation of the system factor of kindergarten and organizational structure

Comment: Figure 2 shows a large difference between the current and expected state of the factor, relating to the system of kindergarten and organizational structure. The results showed that there are gaps in compliance of functional organizational structure in kindergartens with a very good system including delegation of functions.

Factor - Issue No. 11: Another big cultural gap is shown in issue No. 11, it related to the evaluation of the factor of teachers development:

Table 3: Question 11 - comparison of values

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	T value	Z value	H ₀
O11a	4,3	0,53	-3,1812	-2,9109	Reject
O11b	4,7	0,46			

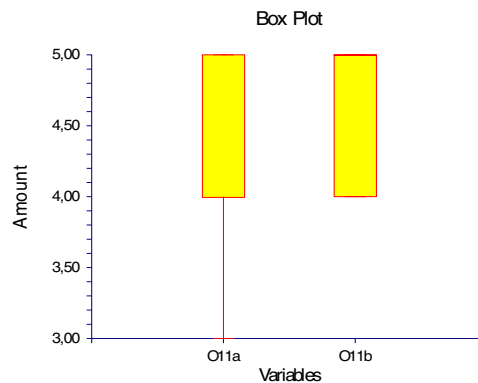


Figure No. 3 - Evaluation of the factor of teachers' development.

Comment: Figure No. 3 - shows a large difference between the current and expected state of the factor concerning the evaluation of development of teachers from kindergartens. The results confirm that kindergartens do not have sufficiently clear support in the professional development of teachers, and that further training of teachers receives only a little importance.

Factor - Issue No. 12: The last example of results and graphical representation of evaluation of school culture, we show a large cultural gap that showed up at issue No. 12 and it is related to the evaluation of the factor of the working background of teachers.

Table 4: Question 12 - comparison of values.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	T value	Z value	H ₀
O12a	3,7	0,56	-8,3927	-5,4783	Reject
O12b	4,8	0,38			

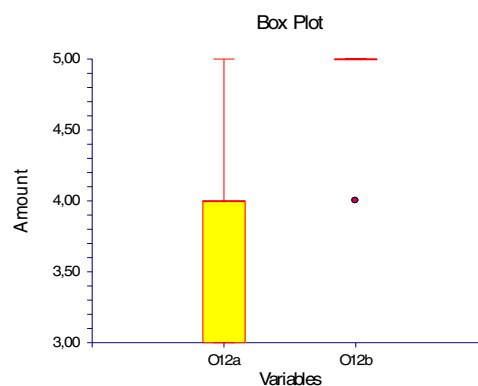


Figure No. 4. – Evaluation of factor of the working background of teachers

Comment: Figure No. 4 - shows the great difference between the current and expected state of the factor relating to the employment background of kindergarten teachers. The environment of kindergartens still has gaps in creating excellent working conditions for teachers work, taking into account the individual needs of workers.

The selected results demonstrate the expected gaps of school culture in kindergartens, and point to factors - weaknesses that have shown to be risky, with the greatest cultural gap.

4. Conclusion

Finally, it should be noted that the specific research project of the Faculty of Education at HKU focused on the analysis and evaluation of school culture in current kindergartens met its objectives. It enabled a reflective view of the culture of kindergartens with the unveiling of strengths and weaknesses. The survey results pointed to the gaps of culture in kindergartens, specifically the factors that have shown to be risky – with the largest cultural gap. This is mainly *compliance of functional organizational structure in kindergartens, the creation of the work background for kindergarten teachers, sufficiently clear support in the professional development of teachers*. The correlations between the factors also confirmed the mentioned results. It is necessary to think about the weaknesses in the form of cultural gaps. They are also a challenge for areas that will need attention in leadership and training of teachers and executive teachers of kindergartens in the Czech Republic.

The information obtained also brought incentives for subjects' innovation from the school management and education of the executive kindergarten teachers at the Faculty of Education at HKU. A specific recommendation and inspiration offer was developed for the development of managerial skills in leadership, which will help remove

weaknesses or problematic factors of the culture in kindergartens, while leading to an improvement in training of teachers and school managers of kindergartens in the area of school management.

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